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Scripted Fidelity

by Lendra

Summary

Time is no obstacle to rattle the foundation of fate, and when Robin awakes alone in a field, he can do little to shake the familiarity of it all. If all can be reversed and destiny rewritten, what will happen when Chrom isn't there to take his hand from the start?

Notes

Thank you all so much for taking the time to read my first posted work! As I checked off, this is a joint piece between my girlfriend and I! We are terribly fond of Robin and Chrom and there is so little for these boys in the fandom, we couldn't help but create something of our own.

We hope this is to your liking and please keep in mind, two people are writing this so you may notice a slight difference in styles. As excruciating as our writing may be, I hope you all enjoy!

Shift

Sound was the first thing to come; muffled chirps and trills of various insects, louder than expected and almost unfamiliar in tone. They were close….oddly close. Soft rustling, both from the legs of those little insects clinging to long blades of grass and from the slightest breeze that swept overhead was the next thing to register in the darkness. That darkness began to soften, lighten and become redder in hue.

I'm asleep…

A ridiculous thought. If it really were unconsciousness that caused this strange state of confused listening, then the thought couldn't occur, period. Unless this was a strangely realistic dream.

I'm waking up then.

It may have even been more ridiculous that he was now flatly coming to a compromise with himself on the earlier notion of being fully asleep and yet still thinking consciously.

Soft blackness cracked open to harsh light and the sound he heard now became an uncomfortable grunt from the back of his own throat. Yes, he was indeed waking somewhere. The question was where in god's name it was.

With a stiffness to his movement, he rose from where he'd lain, feeling quite sore and terribly dazed before taking the time to really observe his surroundings.

The expanse of the horizon was rich with thick patches of grass and wild flowers freckled about the field. The occasional overgrowth and an even more intermittent cluster of trees made up the majority of what he could observe before him until everything dissipated into the warm glow of the rising sun.

Realistically speaking, the scenery evoked such a feeling of serenity, and yet he felt little else than unease. His surroundings were unfamiliar at best. What's more , he couldn't recall at all how he had ended up in such a placid location. His fingers pushed into his hair, furrowing his brows heavily as he did his best to properly recall the events that could have lead up to such circumstances.

And yet, despite his efforts, everything was turning up entirely blank.

The slightest bit of panic was beginning to pulsate through him, a level of anxiety settling into the notches of his spine and threatening to click its way up to the back of his mind. But he was nothing if not practical. Throwing himself into the haze of troubling uncertainty and worry would make the answers all the more difficult to find. Taking a moment to breathe, he began to pat himself down, observing the clothing he was wearing; checking for a satchel, a knapsack, a pouch, pockets, anything. Any possessions he had were few and far between, though he was not entirely without chattels. There were a few bundles of papers, a couple of knick-knacks, a pathetic amount of single notes and a torn piece of parchment that he'd only found after pulling off his small overcoat.

Pressing his fingers to his temple, his white brows were guttering once more as he didn't find a single morsel of food, nor a map to perhaps gather some semblance of locality. He only hoped the folded papers had more to tell him, gently unfolding them as they seemed somewhat fragile.

At first, it appeared to be some sort of official document, the format foreign, though he could

gather enough to know it was certifying something.

These were…naturalization papers? No, they were worded a bit differently…This was certainly just acknowledging the named individual was a citizen of the country Ylisse.

The thumping inside his chest rose quickly, feeling anxiety and relief all in one as he realized the name on the page was his own. These were his documents. He was a resident of Ylisse.

So why did his very own birth country not conjure up more memories than it was now? He felt he knew the definition of the place, something akin to a textbook passage of it's history, but nothing like someone would know or feel of their own homeland. What had happened inside his head to leave him in such a blank state?

At the very least, he needn't worry about being in any trouble with authorities should he ever run into a situation of that nature…but as far as he could tell, civilization wasn't actually…a main issue. Rather, the lack of it was.

Another soft grunt slipped through his lips as he stood, brushing away broken blades of dry grass and just the slightest hint of soil while the folded pages were gently tucked away once more. At the very least, he was in a rather lush area. If he were really that far from other people, he was certain he could survive at least a good two weeks or more on the land, that knowledge leaving him a bit more at ease. Priority one for now would be simply centering himself, discovering his cardinal directions, and perhaps finding a bit of water before getting too far.

It was probably best to find high ground if at the least to try and survey his surroundings, though he had been walking for nearly an hour, perhaps more if he was judging the position of the sun correctly and the land thus far had remained relatively flat. The sporadic appearance of a knoll or two did little to give him purchase and he felt rather silly scuttling up to the top to find he was staring at the exact scenery he'd been staring at and no water thus far.

At the very least, he could sort out his memories, or lack thereof during his quest for civilization, granted he wasn't meandering about in circles without knowing it with everything so similar in appearance. It was odd enough that he awoke upon daybreak completely isolated and with so little at his disposal. If he had been journeying far, he would have at *least* hoped he'd be smart enough to have brought supplies. It would explain a bit more if he had been mugged, but again, he could do little to test his theory with no memory.

"This is pathetic…" It was really the first time he'd spoken and his voice almost surprised him. Trying to keep himself optimistic wasn't necessarily hard, but he certainly wouldn't deny he was feeling very frustrated. Without the ability to judge his progress, he felt he was making none what so ever. He had to keep moving if he was actually going to get anywhere, but he felt very little motivation or incentive to pick a direction and stick with it.

If nothing else, he could continue his general path and avoid walking directly into the sun and hope for the time being that it was in a route he wanted to go.

He didn't necessarily account for another hour or two of walking and still finding little to act as a mile marker. He was beginning to grumble to himself as the sun was climbing higher. Lifting one pale hand to shade his eyes, he hoped to maybe tell the time by sun position, but as his luck would have it, one glance away from his path and his foot caught on some offensive object, presumably a rock out of place and he was flailing to catch his balance. Once he regained his poise and was ready to explode at that point, he was whipping around to glare daggers at the rock before plucking it up and hurling it into the distance; snorting once with a gruff nod and feeling quite justified at his momentary mad outburst.

Turning to continue on, he paused a moment when he only just happened to notice that the rock was, in fact, lining what could only be a dirt road.

He stared in disbelief for a moment, eyes trailing along the path to further convince himself he wasn't seeing things in his slight hysteria, but it continued on as inoffensively as any dirt road could; it was almost mockingly comical.

However, just along the dip of the road and lifting above the peak of a hill was just the kind of reprieve he could have ever hoped for as a rather simple horse-pulled supply carriage was making its rickety way toward him. With an excitement pulsing through him, he was immediately rushing forward to wave it down before he abruptly lost his footing and fell face first into the dirt; a cloud of dust and dry soil billowing around him upon impact.

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"Boy, you're sure lucky I came along if you ain't carrying nothing to protect yourself." Luckily, the humiliation of eating a mouthful of dirt before frantically flagging down the passing farmer seemed to be kindly brushed over. "You're welcome to climb in the back with my boy, just mind the crop. Don't crush nothin'."

A thumb hooked over his shoulder as the middle aged man peered down from beneath a large and tattered straw hat; a very typical looking farmer…almost laughable with how quaint it seemed. Despite the act of kindness, he could tell this man was not unguarded, not naive. "Don't take it personal, but we're both armed. Been trouble with bandits all over lately. Surprised y'mother ain't sent 'ya off with knife or nothin' if yer travelin' alone."

So the mugging seemed like an all the more probable explanation now. Head trauma would seem reasonable to expect as well, but his skull felt fine, to be honest. Could the work of mages be to blame? A hex, perhaps?

Nodding in understanding and thanks, he dusted off dirtied pants and shirt a bit more and rounded the wagon, seeing a set of eyes peeking back. That must have been the armed son, as mentioned before. The shaggy brown hair led him to believe he was just barely reaching his teens, even more so when he reached the back and saw the baby face and slightly ill-fitting work clothes.

"Sorry to intrude - Thank you again."

The boy remained wary even so, something admirable and perhaps a bit unsettling as his stare didn't falter even after he had finished flicking off the last bit of visible dust from his boots. As much as he didn't want to gawk straight back at him, he found it was far more awkward attempting to avoid eye contact and hence began a rather patchy, unofficial staring contest with the boy.

Oddly enough, the boy was the first to break the silence.

"You a time traveler or somethin'?" The question caught him entirely off guard and, perhaps less odd was his lack of a response as he was at a loss for words momentarily.

"Pardon?" He managed after trying to make sense of his question, or see if he was possibly joking. The fluffy haired little farmer's expression assured him that he certainly wasn't joking and his question was quite legitimate.

"Your hair; It's white as snow, but you can't be older than my pa. I ain't seen people with hair like yours." His explanation was accompanied by such conviction in his eyes, the acclaimed white-haired individual was still unable to respond with much else aside an incredibly lame 'uh…'

Luckily, his father cut in before the tension could worsen.

“Donny, stop spoutin’ nonsense back there. You got hay for brains, boy? Plenty of people from other countries to the west got hair like him. Goin’ off ‘bout time travel, everyone’s gonna say you’ve gone mad.” As grateful as he was for the father’s interjection, he couldn’t help feeling the slightest bit of pity toward the boy now identified as Donny. Peaking at the older man, he was leaning toward Donny in a rather secretive manner and responded rather playfully. He hoped to earn the boy’s trust through jest and perhaps be spared of further staring.

“I personally think time-traveler sounds far more interesting.”

Bingo; a little grin.

“I reckon nothin’s impossible, you know?” The boy whispered back, wary of his father overhearing such wild thoughts of his.

“I heard of these – these wizards and such having magic! Or…uh…Mags ‘er something…”Was he trying to think of the word ‘mage’? He couldn’t remember Ylisse having such a lack of mages that it would be a rarity. Then again…he hardly remembered anything at all. Perhaps the town he came from was just that quaint.

“But if they can do spells, who says they ain’t got the means to jump around through time, right? Seems kinda scary. But I sure wouldn’t mind doin’ it myself for fun once in a while. You could skip right to Sunday supper!”

The white haired individual couldn't help the chuckle that bubbled from his throat, rather fond of the innocent charm of Donny's perception of time travel. There were many terrible things that could be wrought were time travel possible, hence the prospect of using it to leap to a preferred meal was endearing.

“I’d probably skip through rainy days and harsh winters, realistically.” He responded honestly, feeling his was rather boring and perhaps even too practical to worth mentioning, though he’d already done so. After such a comment, however, they were dwelling on the topic no further.

As frustrating as it was, keeping awake was far more difficult than expected. Were it any other situation, he was sure keeping alert and studying his surroundings as best possible would come easily, but he still was unsure the specifics of his circumstance regardless. His exhaustion could have come from many things; residual effects of a tonic he’d been slipped, the afterglow of a hex, or any amount of your everyday fatigue that came from common stresses. He’d never consider himself a very uptight individual, and yet…

His brows cinched a bit, body tensing as his fingers were beginning to pull apart the hay pieces that gathered at his feet.

He couldn’t much recall what kind of individual he was, *period.* His lapse in memory had been troubling him, but something about it felt eerie and unsettling, or perhaps he was justifiably paranoid. He would expect to remember certain things, information that is ingrained within one’s psyche that a simple spell or concoction or even a blow to the head couldn’t reverse, and yet—

“—Boy?...Hey, you hear me?”

Startled from his reverie, his lashes were fluttering to attention and was immediately trying to tune into a conversation he hadn’t been aware he was a part of.

“I’m sorry—I didn’t.” He answered abashedly before the farmer was repeating himself.

“I said ‘you got a name’, stranger? Realized we didn’t introduce ourselves before.”

A slight dread settled over him as the question that had been troubling him the most was poised before him.

Gods, if he couldn't even remember this much about himself… He couldn't imagine this could be the work of anything other than a powerful curse. He would have to try to find a healer for this type of memory loss, but for now, it felt too suspicious to say nothing.

-the papers in his pocket.

"R-Robin-" He said with the slightest amount of hesitation upon recalling the documents, though it could be associated with being taken off guard. No one seemed to pay much mind to his stammered response, rather the farmer responded with a nod before continuing his string of somewhat troubling, albeit innocent questions.

"Yer goin' to the capital, right? What business ya got there in the city?" Another thing he couldn't answer…and found himself somewhat panicked that he couldn't.

"You visiting family? That why yer out here alone?"

With the papers providing him with a name he had only deduced was his own upon process of elimination alone, he felt completely and utterly exposed upon the next question. He contemplated stalling for a moment, feigning mishearing his question if only to search more vigorously for the answer himself for a few seconds longer.

Upon opening his mouth, he could only manage the slightest sound before Donny was popping up beside him and excitedly peering out through the front of the carriage; his fluffy head of hair struggling to get the best view possible from behind his father.

“Pa! Is that it? Is that the capital?” His excitement wasn’t shared with his father as he responded, though this was presumably the first time Donny had ever seen the city. Pushing himself to his feet and wobbling his way to the front as well, Robin was gingerly peeling back the protective cloth of the carriage to get a view of the city himself; feeling a bit of relief that he and Donny shared a similar feeling of an exciting reveal.

From what he could make of it at such a great distance, it was massive in size and beautifully decorated in stone, wood, marble and granite. The veil of space that blanketed a clear view only had Robin all the more anticipatory to see just how large it was up close, but any further analysis was cut short. A heavy, thick pulse suddenly surged at his temple, setting him off balance for a moment before all sound deafened and left his ears ringing before fizzling into a static. He hadn’t noticed the way he’d buckled until Donny was upon him and worrying about him in an innocent fashion.

“I’m alright—just stood up a bit too fast.” Offering a pathetic half grin, he was quick to dismiss any further concern; a momentary dizziness washing over him before fading just as quickly. Barely peeking out the front again, Robin turned away to settle himself back down where he’d been seated, fingers curling restlessly into his palms.

This was not his first time visiting the capital of this country. He had seen it before, somewhere.

"Oh, pa says that means you gotta get food in you when you get spinning like that." It made sense from an outsider's perspective and he certainly wouldn't correct his naive deduction.

There was too much he would have to explain and such little knowledge of the topic he had for himself. Brown eyes shifting toward the soft rummaging beside him, he jerked back as a piece of

bread was suddenly thrust before his nose.

"I got an apple too if ya want. Did'ja not get enough breakfast?" Good question. Judging by the sharp growl in his stomach in response to having food waved before him, he'd wager he hadn't eaten at all. He might not have even had dinner with the way these hunger pangs were suddenly erupting with such ferocity.

"Ah, thank you - you don't mind?"

Bashfulness crept over him as he wanted to accept the food as quickly as possible, but it would be rude, he felt, to just snatch it up. Would it also be inconsiderate to offer money? He already planned to offer something upon arriving in the city. Counting the coins was one of the first things he done to try to jog his memory. He wasn't too poor off, but certainly he'd have to ration himself and make wise financial decisions from here on.

“We’ve plenty to spare. It would be kinda’ heartless to let ya go hungry. A little bread and an apple or two is no sweat off our backs.” The father dismissed, demonstrating that despite his stern disposition at times, he was a kind individual and something his son obviously admired him for.

Robin eagerly accepted their offering after giving his thanks once again, eating with vigor as he was far more famished than originally anticipated and only upon touching food to his lips was he aware of such an appetite. He ate only what he was offered, that being a small loaf of bread and one apple, though after brutally eying the barrel of apples akin to a ravenous animal, they were offering him a few more apples; something he quite abashedly accepted with a pink to his cheeks as he hadn’t intended to intimidate his gracious hosts with his hunger. He didn’t have a means to store them, but he certainly would not pass up the offer of free food as his situation didn’t warrant the expense of a decent meal with his limited currency.

As they drew closer to the city and the walls of stone and granite grew higher and higher, Robin was spared a moment of his apprehension to regard the city in absolute awe. As impossible as it seemed, the sheer size of the capital was swallowed in the bustling and exciting chaos of its citizens that were plentifully peppered within the gate entrance and even outside of it. The farmer’s carriage stopped only a moment at the threshold of the posterns, exchanging a few familiar words with the guards stationed there before setting forth and a moment of surrealism settled over the white haired boy.

He would have to carve his way into a life that already existed and knew nothing about with nothing but the clothes on his back. He’d no doubt be parting with his kind companions in due time and hence forth, he’d have to blaze a trail entirely anew. The tick in his temple and the pumping of his heart grew faster as his fingers shredded the straw that unfortunately found its way in his fingers.

"This is as far as we can take 'ya. I reckon you can find yer way from here?" The kindly farmer had halted his horse, sliding down to lash the reins to a small post.

With a soft thud, Donnel had hopped down with a pail, ready to water the animal as it nickered and pawed the packed earth in anticipation. With fingers wringing softly against his wrist bracers, Robin battled with his apprehension. Should he swallow this embarrassment or pride, whatever held him back from asking more of the city he was supposed to know? Or was information gathering his best course of action? The latter felt more comfortable, albeit perhaps a bit foolish.

"Yeah. You've done much more for me than I ever expected." His hand began to slide to the fold of his pocket but a soft grunt and shake of the farmer's head stopped him, Robin’s cheeks coloring.

"Hang on to yer money, boy. It's certainly nothing we couldn't spare. You just be more careful leavin' this place alone next time, y'hear?" He responded with a humbled nod, nearly startling as the shaggy haired son popped into view, grin toothy with a piece or two of dried hay jutting from his brown locks.

"Come by and buy some vegetables next time, too! We can give you a nice discount. Our prices are real good!" They were charming folks, kindness infectious as a smile spread to the displaced traveler's mouth.

"Yeah, I'll be sure to do that. Thank you for everything~"

He felt inclined to bow his head, though the two were pleased enough with a wave in their direction as Robin picked a direction at random and went with it.

If there were a designated time perfectly suited to panic, it would be right then and there. Every circumstance justified having at least a momentary break down, but Robin prided himself in practicality.; or at least the hunch that he was a practical individual considering.

Panicking would do him no good what so ever and coming across as neurotic to a general audience of strangers wouldn't bode well for him, either. He had managed to get this far in one day alone, he would manage one way or another. Currently, the wisest idea was to map out the city; get a feel of where he was and where he had apparently come from and if he were lucky, jog his memory and get a bit of a lead instead of aimlessly grasping for straws.

For the most part, he seemed to blend in here. No one really gave him any strange looks, not so long as he didn't stand gawking at any one thing for too long. But the high walls of the city, alongside the sheer bustle of people certainly was a spectacle all on its own. Flags waved in the noon breeze, a few soldiers marched about with the townspeople.

It seemed to be with harmony that people lived here under their government. There was no sense of tension other than hushed whispers he could hear about more bandit attacks around the borders. It was as the farmer had mentioned; there was discord amongst the people and the random attackers that plagued their fields. It felt good to at least be in a country where it's people and it's rulers seemed more or less peaceful with one another, despite the surge of outlaws.

Peace was always something taken advantage of. The crowds of people did prove to set the light haired traveler on edge from time to time, feeling anxiety grip at having all these voices and bodies mill and bump through the streets, doing daily routines…and yet not a single one was familiar. The thorn of isolation drove itself into the back of his brain a little deeper. In the same token, some ease settled into his bones to know this was not a land ruled by an iron fist. He'd have less to worry about being picked out and locked up for seeming out of place…so long as the papers he owned really were accurate.

After several hours of meandering the streets and attempting to piece something together, maybe establish some sort of lead, he was left with little to work with and decided to redirect his focus to locating a place to stay for the night.

Digging into his pockets, he was pulling out the rather pathetic amount of currency and stared at it with disdain and a cinch to his brow. He tucked it away with a heavy sigh of defeat and pinched the bridge of his nose as he struggled to weigh his options. Certainly coming to the capital of the country had many benefits, but when it came to bargaining a bed, well, he was more than a pretty penny short.

He was lucky to have come across the farmer and his son who were so willing to give him the lift, but he wouldn't hold his breath for similar circumstances in the city. But at the very least, he had

to try. Perhaps if he traded his labor services for lodging, he would make some headway…

“I’m sorry, but we have all the work we need. You’d best look elsewhere.”

“Oh, to be young~! Cherish your youth while you have it, don’t be in such a hurry to grow up.”

“Sorry, kid, we’re busy here; can’t take the time to listen to every person who’s got a story.”

“We don’t need any more pretty-faced boys toying with my daughter’s heart; get lost, lout.”

“Is this McKenna’s doing?! You can go ahead and tell that pompous, dizzy-eyed stock-fish that he’ll choke on my boots the next time I see his pathetic face!”

“You don’t exactly look like you’re cut out for this kind of work, kid. I like your spunk, though!”

“No.”

Even after jerking his head back to avoid injury, his nose was still caught in the crossfire- the door slamming just hard enough into it as it was whipped shut in his face and he was momentarily met with an explosion of stars. It took him a moment to regain his sight while the spots slowly faded from his vision.

Quick to check and see if his nose was bleeding, (it wasn’t) Robin was wearily settling himself atop a gathering of crates nestled against the last building he’d made his most recent and potentially final attempt at. Rubbing the sore appendage, he was reaching his free hand into a satchel he’d secured and pulled out a stick of dried fruit he’d been offered out of what he could only presume was pure pity.

His expression remained relatively deadpanned and somewhat annoyed as he chewed, half pouting and a bit too stubborn to wipe the bead of tears that had reactively gathered from the smarting blow to his nose. More outlandish accusations aside, he wasn’t *that* childlike, was he? Arguably, he wasn’t *large* for his age and perhaps leaned on the smaller side, but…--how old was he, anyway?

“Hey, you there,”

a voice interrupted, pulling Robin from his troubling reverie. Lifting his head of fluffy white hair and flicking warm brown eyes about, he tried to locate who had addressed him. A rather breathy chuckle gave him another clue as he turned his head right around to spot a woman peering out from the alleyway just adjacent to where he sat.

“You need work?” Interest immediately piqued, Robin was nodding once in affirmation before she beckoned him to follow. With little to lose, he hopped down from where he sat and skittered over.

It took little else than a look inside and rather unwarranted groping from the ‘woman’ for Robin to revise his decision and fervently decline their enthusiastic offer. Perhaps it could be considered flattery but Robin would have to be on a whole different level of desperate to agree to – he swallowed thickly – *that* kind of work entertainment.

What was life like for the poor beggars who weren't even as well off as he? The blind or those with loss of limb? It was certainly a harrowing experience, even if only for a day, to be unable to find work and provide for only himself; even more so with no identity at all.

He lifted the broken handle of a discarded broom as he walked back into a small alleyway while he centered his thoughts once more and, more or less, moped a bit. What was the worst that could

happen if he did not find work or shelter for the night? He could certainly stand a night out in the elements…but would soldiers come to rouse him for trespassing? It would be best not to garner that sort of attention to himself.

Heavy, hot air gushed from his lips in an exasperated sigh, wrist twirling as the worn rod in hand rolled over his palm and over the back of his hand, spinning it in a three hundred and sixty degree turn. Oh…he didn't know he could do that. He twirled it again, brows lifted, feeling the natural movement as he could easily wield the staff in a somewhat flashy manner. Did he have some sort of training in defensive arts?

The corners of his lips twitched, beginning to spin the broken shaft faster, switching hands, even taking an imaginary strike outward with a small 'ha!' as he cut the air.

Yes, he was good with his hands…! Alright…so perhaps this type of skill could be put to use. He spun it again, around his back, rolling his wrist and striking. He was pretty cool!

With just a glimpse as the staff flicked over the back of his right hand to spin up into the air, something suddenly caught his eye. A piece of a marking, though too intricate to be a birth mark, drew his attention for just a moment; dull against his skin and peeking out from his wrist bracers. The moment proved long enough for the staff to swing back down with gravity and strike him dead between the eyes, completely shattering any personal fantasy of being suave while he groaned and cupped his face, wood clattering to the ground.

It was best just to leave it, perhaps even shuffle off should anyone have caught an eyeful of such an embarrassing display. Boots scuffing the cobblestone, he moved further down the alley with a deep blush to his cheeks, just around the corner before allowing his earlier observations to come to the forefront. Pulling the stiff leather back carefully between two fingers, his brown eyes scanned what he could see of the foreign design, albeit it seemed incredibly faded.

What kind of art was this…? A family brand? It appeared…well, a bit unsettling with no context behind the multiple eye-like characters. Then again, perhaps someone could identify the design; tell him which family it belonged to or any sort of meaning it had.

It could be a good clue….assuming that's what it really was. Gods, could such a mark be the brand of a thief or other criminal perhaps?! Slapping the leather back down, he yanked the bracer a bit more fitfully down his wrist to cover it up; best *not* to gamble on such a thing.

He tried for the last remaining hours of sunlight to find some possible place to take refuge for the night and from his observation, he was nowhere near a convent or church of any kind to provide potential sanctuary. Nothing was guaranteed of course, and as friendly as the overall people of the city had proven to be, he wasn't so naïve as to flounce about at night without so much as a general knowledge of the city's layout.

He wasn't so lucky as to land a place to sleep, though he couldn't say he was surprised. He also wasn't so daring as to sleep out in the open, lest he want to reap the consequences that came with being entirely exposed. The elements were the least of his worries, though he certainly wouldn't mind a dry place in case of a morning rain.

Wandering as far as he was comfortable in the dwindling hours of twilight, his first glimpse at night life was rather heartening, a new kind of energy glowing in the citizens as lanterns were beginning to illuminate the streets in an array of colorful flames. He wouldn't have minded loitering about and socializing, familiarizing himself with the exciting rush of sundown a bit more, but he knew it wouldn't be wise. Perhaps in time he'd have the luxury, but he had his priorities.

He wasn't fond of being sneaky or dishonest, but he had little other choice if he was going to get

by. Nearing the entrance of the city, Robin came across a stable of livestock conveniently abandoned for the evening. He didn't want to consider himself avaricious but he wouldn't lie that he thought twice about utilizing the space simply because of the smell.

Common sense won out, of course, and after finding the cleanest pile of hay, he nestled himself in as comfortably as he possibly could and fell asleep far faster than he would have anticipated.

He dreamed of eating from a basket of plump, ripe peaches.

Press

Chapter Notes

> I'm so pleased everyone enjoyed the first chapter! Thank you so much for all your support and the comments you all left!
> In case it wasn't clear by now, this story works up slowly. I'm not sure how many chapters it will be, but my girlfriend and I aren't so cruel as to drag it out beyond anyone's tolerance.
>
> ANYWAY~! I hope you continue to enjoy our story! It's such a pleasure to write.

A hot, sticky rush of air on the back of his neck was not what he expected to wake up too.

It was not a natural humid breeze and had he more time to process the sensation, he may have figured it out before the sharp tug at his white locks woke him in a frenzy with a sharp yelp of pain.

"Owww, *owowow*!!" Another hot blast of damp air hit him, hearing the huff of the large beast above him as his brown eyes opened wide in a panicked daze. A horse was currently sampling his hair, testing it as food as it was presently resting among what the mare had deemed her breakfast.

"Shah, you get away from there! Git!!" Gods - someone had already come in before he had a chance to sneak out! And by the sound of it, quite the stern stable hand. It would be best to make his escape before he was trampled…or speared on the end of a pitchfork for trespassing.

The horse made a huff of discontent, shuffling back out of the stall it was being lead from while the older woman's voice continued to scold it from just yards away. He'd have to make a break for it. He'd missed his chance to get out before sunrise by an hour or more.

The messy, straw filled mop of white hair popped over the side of the splintering wooden door, eyeing the gaunt, gangly woman who was huffily filling pails with grain as she mumbled to herself (or the horses).

Now!

He made a dash, tripping over his boots, scuffing against the unsteady straw bedding as his exit was less than graceful. Alerting a few of the horses as they turned their heads and flicked their ears forward, he realized he was not being the slightest bit stealthy. He was too disoriented for proper planning, but as luck would have it, he was leaping out of the door before the woman could much register the disturbance.

"H-hey!! Who's there?! Show yourself, thief!!" Sprinting away down the packed dirt road certainly made him look like a thief, didn't it?

"Sorry!! W-Wrong stable!!!" He instinctually called back, wanting to somehow cure the misunderstanding, or apologize, anything.

Idiot, it's not going to help to yell like a madman either. Just keep quiet - you're already screwing this up!!

He ran as fast as he figured wouldn't raise suspicion, though even as such, it didn't take long for him to become rather winded. He was rounding the first corner he saw, now well out of the crossfire for good measure, though he had to double over to catch his breath; cheeks flushed pink with exertion as adrenaline whirred inside him.

That was certainly one way to start the morning. Even if he could have continued sleeping well into the early hours of the afternoon, there was no question he was fully and entirely awake.

Once he'd managed to settle his thundering heart rate, he took the time to dust himself off. Stray bits of hay clung to his gray pants and jutted out of his boots a bit; trace amounts of the splintered grass making its way all the way up in and under his little yellow coat.

With no cloak, cape or robe to keep him warm, he was certainly grateful for his makeshift cot of the previous evening, but such wouldn't keep him from grumbling as he plucked away every insufferable blade. That, however, was when he noticed.

"My satchel…" he remarked aloud, dread settling over him like a bristled chill as he immediately flounced about, cocking his head every which way to peer at every possible angle of himself. After making a thorough sweep, he was letting out a rather defeated sigh as he wiped a hand down his face in exasperation. It seemed inevitable he be met with every opposing force that could be realistically thrown at him and where he had little of real value in the sack he'd left behind, it *did* have what remnants of food he'd gathered of the day prior.

"Stop, thief!"

Immediately set on edge once more, Robin was startling to attention as he presumed automatically that the accusation could only be directed toward himself. Despite being poised to dart off once again, he managed only two steps before he was colliding rather roughly with another body and the both of them were crashing to the unforgiving cobble stone below.

Robin took the brunt of the fall as he was, accursedly, the smaller of the two; the man's elbow landing a direct blow to his solar plexus and knocked the wind right from his lungs. His accidental assailant was quick to recover, scrambling to his feet and hasty in his attempted get away, but what Robin lacked in physical prowess he made up for with facetiousness.

This was undoubtedly the thief aforementioned, not a difficult deduction upon his nature alone, but with Robin's up close and personal experience, there really was no doubting it. His recovery certainly wasn't as fast, yet he'd managed his footing and in a few quick strides, Robin was curling his fingers into the dark fabric that cloaked the pickpocket's upper body and hurled him back; setting the man off balance and struggling for purchase.

Robin supposed it should have been suspected as he was clipped by a hefty swing to his face, aimed for his nose but catching him at the corner of the mouth instead as his jaw clattered and his teeth sunk into his tongue. The second strike was something else entirely.

It felt as though it were charted – as if Robin could have pinpointed the man's directive on a map. He knew where he would take aim, and as such, he dodged the strike with such fluidity, he almost lost himself within the moment entirely due to pure shock.

This was instinct.

Unable to dwell upon it, Robin poised to parry another blow before it was all put to an abrupt and anticlimactic end as a burly onlooker and his friend took matters into their own hands; ensnaring the pickpocket in their arms and subduing him by brute force.

Robin's feet wobbled a bit, becoming unsteady as the adrenaline began to fade and his jaw throbbed, tongue too. Crimson beaded against the front of his gray undershirt, instinctually sending the young man to dart the tip of his tongue over his bottom lip, nose wrinkling in response. The salty, iron flavor indicated his lip had indeed split during the impact. Great…just another thing to make him look even less approachable; a big welt on his jaw and a puffy, bleeding lip.

"You okay?" One of the men who'd wrestled down the thief asked once it was noticed that the white haired boy was staggering. With a soldier now swiftly on his way over, it seemed best not to linger.

"Ah, yes - I'm fine. Thank you - just dazed-" He was interrupted as the woman who'd been screaming after the cutpurse made her entrance, eyes wide and brown curls messy around her face. It appeared they'd worked free of her bonnet while she dashed after them.

"Ah!! Young man, are you alright?!" The question was repeated as he prepared yet again to wave it off, though was being clutched by the shoulders before a proper response could formulate on his lips.

"I saw him hit you! Gods, you've got blood on your mouth!" She was…certainly animated, reaching for her apron to dab his face, pushing back his hair in the same motion. Her enthusiasm was dazing him perhaps more than the wounds, fumbling over his words as she washed over him like a whirlwind, checking him here and there, tugging his clothes and pressing at his skin.

"That was kind of you -- but you're unarmed!! I'd never sleep if a boy was gutted retrieving my things!!" He'd had a knife? Brown eyes flicked over, just catching a glimpse of the blade as it had been easily wrestled away, especially after the criminal had been put out with a choke hold by the very satisfied, muscular duo. Having instinct enough to dodge punches seemed impressive, but not having the intuition to check for a weapon had been careless.

"Sorry, miss - Ah, ouch…" Her prodding wasn't exactly helping his wounds any.

“Goodness, for someone so young, that was quite brave of you.” She remarked in a somewhat huffy manner of praise, still appearing distressed at the prospect of injury more than impressed at his heroics. Whether it be of goodwill or some residual panic from the responsibility of his probable death, she didn’t cease her fussing until she finally appeared content with her work. Robin was, to say the very least, quite relieved to be free of it.

“Ah, I reacted more impulsively than consciously, I have to admit.” He confessed somewhat abashedly, his tongue pressing to the inside of his lip before lifting his hand to gingerly swipe his thumb against the swollen skin.

The woman who had flustered about him not moments ago went still upon Robin speaking, seeming shocked for whatever reason, though before the white haired boy could inquire, the rather burly man who had addressed him prior was slapping a hardy hand onto his back and nearly knocked the wind straight from his lungs.

“Now that was a rush to get your blood pumping so early in the morning, wasn’t it!” He had seemed terribly pleased at the commotion from the start. As Robin recovered from the amicable assault, he couldn’t help but note how unperturbed by strangers (or more bluntly, the general understanding of personal space) the two of them were. It was quite the opposite of the day before, though Robin couldn’t decide if he preferred it or not.

Eager as he was to make some connections, such meant he would have to procure answers about himself that he certainly didn’t have. It was a rather arduous cycle he was entombed in; should he

press forward and blaze a new trail, or should he attempt to recover his memory little by little?

Fortunately he was unable to dwell on the ever present problem for much longer as the woman said something that worked its way past his musings.

“My apologies, did you just say…” He was wary to finish his sentence, lest he’d misheard and come across as a twit.

“I said I would like to treat you to a bit of breakfast, offer my gratitude if you will.” She reiterated.

Etiquette urged him to graciously refuse her offer as he’d felt he’d done little to warrant a free meal, but whether he was aware or not, Robin’s expression underwent a metamorphosis; becoming doe-eyed and cheeks dusting an anticipatory pink. He prayed the voracious gurgle of his gut went unheard as he was quick to swallow the slaver that gathered along his tongue.

“If you would have me, I would be delighted.” Polite as he endeavored to sound, his voice cracked ever so slightly and did not go unnoticed, though thankfully only evoked a little giggle of amusement.

As unwise as it may have been to follow a stranger back to their home, it seemed more so to refuse a free meal. Not to mention the fact that he owned very little of worth, so robbery didn’t seem to be a high threat to his person.

The woman who led him along, however, seemed to have changed in her demeanor. Strands of thick hair wound around her index, eyes caught between staring and averting as she chattered further about the ‘brave rescue’, to which he always politely waved off. Hopefully she wasn’t feeling nervous about her offer now. He certainly would never want to make such a kind host feel uncomfortable, so as such, he tried his best to appear as harmless as possible. It didn’t feel terribly difficult considering his rather…scrawny body type and round face.

“Ah, my manners – My name is Margaret~”

Gods, introductions again. Familiar anxiety bubbled in his gut, tongue feeling tight in his mouth while the response came out as a result of some mental practice.

“Robin – It’s very nice to meet you…Miss Margaret?” He tested, making an assumption he hoped wouldn’t offend. Her soft flush and smile confirmed it before her words did.

“Right, right~ No husband just yet. Work keeps me a bit too busy these days for courting.”

Robin was giving a nod of understanding, not wanting to dwell upon the topic if it was going to leave the woman in an uncomfortable position. He didn’t much care about her marital status as he wanted to make sure he would address her properly and respectfully.

He would have been perfectly content if their journey remained in silence, however that was not to be so. She had taken to small talk, certainly not something Robin was necessarily troubled with, though he had few cards to play with and though he wasn’t the most charismatic individual, he would gladly divert the topic of conversation to her to spare himself further analysis.

Yet as his luck would have it, she was intrigued by him and only wished to know more. Perhaps it was deceptive of him, but he found himself rather skilled in dodging direct answers and changing subjects. The notion that perhaps karma was rearing its ugly head and, just perhaps, he was currently suffering the residual effects of his own well deserved karma-induced punishment had occurred to him. He only hoped he wasn’t so despicable a human being, though he couldn’t be too sure.

The momentarily bleak thought was wiped clean the instant they arrived as the rich, aromatic scent of breads, pastries and fresh meats immediately resulted in salivation and an embarrassing growl to erupt from his gut. His cheeks immediately colored and a hand pressed against his stomach though he knew it futile in masking any sound. Luckily she found it more a compliment than rude.

“Is this your work place?” He inquired, eager to direct attention away from his blathering belly.

She was placing firm fists upon her hips in pride, grinning nearly from ear to ear as she was only casting him a playful eye before marching forward and walking right in; holding the front door for him as her actions easily answered his question.

Without hesitation, Robin quickly followed suit; brown eyes wide in awe as he hadn’t suspected such a grandiose spectacle, although he could likely contribute that to his nigh unbearable hunger.

There were already a few others enjoying meals inside the very warm, clean interior. The floors, albeit worn down from multiple treks across the boards, were well swept and clean of any scraps from the customers, aside from a large knuckle bone, most likely from recently butchered cattle. Gnawing on said bone was a rather long, white and tan dog, ears flopped around its head. It was lanky, but seemingly well fed and cared for. Visitors even called it by name as they would drop small morsels and the long tail would wag in response. As they traveled by, boards creaking, it’s ears barely twitched, head lifting marginally to eye the new young man as they passed by to the counter. There, a far older woman and an equally older man worked diligently; chopping and kneading, chatting with guests and working harder.

“Margaret, you’ve returned without any potatoes? And your bonnet is crooked.” The woman with grey streaks in her hair commented, tucking back a few frizzled pieces herself. Assuming this was her mother, Robin could deduce where the curls had come from.

“What can I fix you up with, young man?” The older gentleman made it a point to address the potential customer entering first and foremost, doing so with raised brows and rough hands covered in goose feathers. Eugh….was he actually plucking one right there? Perhaps it would be best to have food offered by the wife or daughter – not that he would be picky with this kind of accommodation. Simply…dead birds had a strange effect on him; call it a squeamish quirk.

At least I’m learning more about myself.

Before Robin could respond with much of anything, Margaret was piping her retort in a somewhat defensive manner, though appeared eager to showcase the white haired individual. Robin, consequently, was not so eager.

“Well pardon me for my appearance after nearly being pickpocketed of all my belongings.” She huffed in a somewhat sarcastic manner before smiling at the boy beside her who did his best to communicate with his eyes that presenting him to her captive audience really wasn’t necessary.

It didn’t work.

“But this amazingly brave young man prevented that from happening.” The more she talked, the more attention she was drawing and Robin could feel himself start to buckle somewhat under such inquiry. “He chased down the culprit, took him out and returned my satchel to me!”

Where she was all pride and excitement, Robin was quite the opposite.

Those occupying the business were impressed, though it was her parents that were the most attentive to him; expressing levels of gratitude and awe that Robin truly believed was unnecessary.

“Really, it wasn’t so glorious, I—” as much as he had intended to dismiss further praise, they

would hear little of it and the white haired boy couldn't find it within him to refuse any longer after they offered him a freshly cooked meal. Admittedly, he was spared of any personal questions and analysis of his history which absolved a majority of his initial anxiety. Realistically, most who were curious of the ordeal asked solely about that, to which Margaret was more than eager to tell the story herself.

Clapping his hands together in whatever prayer he could think of to whatever god he should be grateful to, Robin thereafter didn't hesitate to promptly inhale his meal with gusto rivaled by no other around him.

It was a wonder he'd managed to catch wind of the conversation at the door, just a decibel above the hum of customer activity and only barely audible against his enthusiastic chewing. It was, at first, ambient noise among all the other chatter before Robin's interest was immediately piqued upon hearing the lasts of it. Almost forgetting his meal altogether, he was honing in as discretely as he could.

"…from what I understand, they've been short staffed lately. With all the elevated crime, people have been on the move to safer positions, y'know?" he hadn't caught much, but it was certainly enough to get him scrambling out of his seat.

Okay, so it *was* dangerous.

If the worn spear in his hand didn't solidify that notion after hearing the men complaining of people being too soft to take on the job, then the small bloodstain he'd spotted on the side of the caravan did.

When he'd first approached the two chatting, wiping food from his still swollen lip to inquire about this potentially open position, he was nearly scoffed at. No doubt the sight of his round face and slight frame had set them sniggering, thinking the approach was some sort of well-played joke. It was the earnestness in his expression that made them second-guess, looking at each other with a mixture of disbelief and concern before delivering their initial response. 'Kid, this isn't the type of work you-' one had started before the other lifted thick brows and muttered. 'Wait, they were talkin' about you taking down a thief earlier, right? How old are 'ya, anyway?'

Now here he was, shuffling along, off the cobblestone onto the packed dirt roads winding out of the safety of the capital. Beside him was a cargo of….well, he wasn't sure, exactly; just goods that were destined for the next town over, as it was loosely explained. He'd peeked under the canvas covering once, but everything was in barrels or wrapped up in tight bundles, probably to keep whatever it was safe from the elements. So long as it was nothing illegal, it didn't seem he needed to be concerned.

The more urgent topic at hand had to do directly with the old, somewhat cheap weapon in his hands. A spear would be good for keeping a distance from any attackers…but could he even wield one? Despite his talent for spinning a broomstick in hand, it still felt awkward pressed in his grip. Not that he had much of a choice without any weapons of his own, he just hoped his lucky scuffle with the thief earlier hadn't been just that; luck. He was betting everything on the notion that he had some self-defense skill, and after smooth talking his employers into believing he did, he'd look like fool if he couldn't deliver.

*A **dead** fool once the bandits are done with me.*

As easily as such thoughts could consume him, he was stubbornly shaking them off if at least to fake himself into being confident. If there was anything that saved someone's life in battle, it was a

calm and collected mind.

He wouldn't say he found resolve per se, but a somewhat inexplicable feeling of composure settled over him; enough to, at the very least, yield the slight shaking in his knees.

He still looked a bit pathetic. Or so claimed his fellow colleague, a presumably more experienced sell sword than himself and rather blunt as it turned out. Oddly enough, the two of them got along rather well and the only threat that had befallen the precious cargo was a family of raccoons in the middle of the night.

As troublesome as it was to be continuously teased for the duration of the return trip about his rather frenzied reaction to finding the animals, the connections he established during such travel proved to be the best reward.

Though he shared little detail of his circumstances, his short time workfellows were more than eager to lend him a helping hand in finding temporary labor. With nothing to offer in gratitude, Robin was unsure why such individuals would extend their aid, but he would question it no further. He couldn't afford much inquiry in his position, so he would do his very best to trust in the disposition of the country's citizens.

First job his trust landed him in was filling barrels with potatoes. It was simplistic, monotonous and honestly, quite boring. It was also physically taxing and alluded to another aspect of himself that he didn't find very appealing.

To put it kindly, his stamina was subpar.

He was often left winded, achy and uncomfortably flushed after his work load and though he was no longer in need of a cloak to stay warm during the day, he truly wasn't sure if he preferred the occasional chill as compared to being hot and *moist.* He grimaced at the thought, presenting yet another issue as well.

He had not bathed since arriving in the capital.

He'd had the fortune of finding a forgotten barrel filled with some rainwater to at least rinse the sweat from his face and arms, but being rather stagnant water and with no soap, it wasn't as satisfying as he expected.

Still, he would take sweaty and unwashed over starving any day. By why exactly was he in this predicament? He wasn't any closer to finding out.

A few more days of shuffling potatoes and escorting another cart put more coins in his pocket, but he had to admit…he was filthy and quite the sad sight. He'd been done the kindness of someone actually allowing him to stay in a stable for a night, but his drifting was beginning to show. A bath, a coat, and an actual roof over his head were needed before he could concentrate on much else other than not starving.

"Nnh…my shoulders…" He muttered, the stiffness beginning to creep in as the day's work had been finished just over an hour ago. In a quiet corner, just between two rather sturdy buildings, was where he'd settled down with his freshly purchased dinner of bread and jerky. He'd been eyeing a couple red, shiny apples at another vendor and lamented now that he had not indulged in one, but it was best to save whatever he could.

A large chunk tore away between his teeth, the bread rather dry against his tongue without any water to accompany his meal. How long would he live like this? Was there anyone even looking for him?

Swallowing the piece, he was sinking his teeth into it for another bite before hissing and promptly pulling the jerky out as he'd bit his tongue. Tears lined his vision just slightly as he'd clamped down rather hard and was most likely bleeding.

Perhaps he had been cursed by a spell of misfortune. It seemed he was constantly riddled with bad happenstances and just barely dodging a risky situation, making a fool of himself all the while. He'd experienced his strokes of luck here and there, yet he'd made little progress in figuring out much of anything about himself.

Sniffing lightly, he leaned his sore body back against the stone wall behind him and let out a rather heavy sigh before sniffing in somewhat weary amusement. Perhaps he should consider prayer? Though he'd little idea which god to pray to, what harm would it do in his situation?

Or would such a thing be unwise…? Would he be scorned for praying out of sheer necessity or his own selfish peace of mind? Religion was a sacred subject, something Robin felt he should fully respect even if he was unsure of where he stood in the mixture, and yet, he couldn't stop himself from gingerly threading his fingers together.

Lining his bottom lip with his bleeding tongue, unthinkingly, he was opening his mouth to start something, *anything* that he could come up with before he was interrupted by the soft voice of another just above him.

"Beg pardon…"

His skeleton nearly popped from his skin in surprise, hands quickly peeling apart and figure making to stand as he was sure whoever had spoken was going to kindly usher him along from where he'd sat. He was probably being an unwitting nuisance for a local shop or home, and thus opened his mouth quickly to answer the soft call. He was met with the sight of long blonde hair and bright robes, soft eyes and a cautious smile, most likely due to his rather 'energetic' response to being called. Oh…was this a woman of religion? He'd seen others dressed in a similar fashion praying in town before, but he could have sworn them to all be men. Perhaps it was just chance and their uniforms were genderless.

Talk about timing…

"Er, I'm sorry, I'm not bothering anyone, am I? I was honestly just looking for a quiet place to eat my dinner. I can move along-"

A hand raised to quell his frantic apology, the smile gracing this stranger's face widening a fraction.

"Please, that is unnecessary. You're certainly no nuisance. I simply came out to inquire why you were sitting in such a place."Goodness, she had a soothing voice. It was deeper than he originally expected, but somehow not unfitting.

"I don't mean any insult to you, but I have noticed you tending to frequent this one spot….but I never actually see you return home. I pray not, but perhaps you are without one…?"

He ...had been observed? For how long...? He could feel the rouge of his cheeks spreading to his ears as he was struck with a flush of humility, attempting to keep composure and appear even a fraction regal as the woman was before him.

Needless to say, he failed miserably.

Caked with dirt and grime and undoubtedly slicked in a greasy film of sweat as well as smelling much the way he felt, there was no countenance he could exude that called for a respectable

impression.

"I suppose I'm in no state to deny it..." He attempted at humor, pathetic as it was and plucked absentmindedly at white pants that were now a rather odd collage of earthy colors.

"If I'm any disturbance, I--" Robin was cut short as her stare and manner of reaching out to him startled him to stillness. She seemed to realize Robin's sudden apprehension and was withdrawing only somewhat.

"I apologize, you just appear to be bleeding..."

Reflexively, Robin suckled his tongue before quickly grimacing and clapping a hand over his mouth as his ears glowed once again.

Another kind and apologetic smile greeted him as the tall woman stood straight once more, a bit of blonde hair slipping past the off white shoulder of her robes. Despite a very beautiful face the outfit seemed...a bit boxy on her. Though...as a religious person, it was probably the intended outcome to not reveal any of her figure.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of. I certainly meant not to startle or embarrass you. I simply wished to offer what little help I can. We all have trials we face in life. It is my mission and my joy to assist those in need."

Could this have been the result of him wanting to turn to a god to pray? He could feel his cheeks heating yet again, watching the radiance of the sincere and benevolent individual before him. Would it be alright to take up an offer of assistance?

"At the very least, I can give you sanctuary for the night. It is going to be a bit colder than we've had and I'm sure a bath and a hot meal would help to rejuvenate you."

Gods, she was a saint. Even if he meant to be humble and think hard about accepting the stranger's kindness, his face lit up and eyes nearly sparkled at the notion. She noticed it too; her own face brightening as a hand motioned him to follow.

"Please, don't be shy. Naga's children all deserve to be shown some kindness in their lives."

Bubbles billowed from his lips, rolling and popping at the surface just below his nose as he continued to buzz his lips in the act of effervescent.

“It’s truly not something to further concern yourself with. It was an honest mistake, I bear no ill will.”

Though the comment was soothing and entirely genuine in their attempts to reassure him, Robin was nearly choking on the hot water, sputtering ungracefully before promptly sinking himself further below the surface; body ruddy in his mortification.

As hungry as he was upon being so kindly invited into the sanctuary presented to him, when he had been offered the opportunity to bathe, he readily cast aside his earlier priorities and barely withheld dancing outside the bath chambers as it was being drawn.

As he was shedding his clothing, however, he was all but scared half to death for a second time that evening as the same voice caught him in the midst of stripping. Requesting Robin leave his clothing to be washed, on top of meandering in while he was half nude, it was a surprise the white haired boy didn’t slip on the slick tile and die a pathetic death.

“Y—You needn’t burden yourself with such things! A lady of your prominence shouldn’t touch my sullied clothing; p-please leave me to take care of my belongings, miss!” be babbled, awkwardly caught between pulling his clothing back on or keeping them steady enough to remain decent.

Robin, however flustered and skittish, appeared to be the only one of the two who was embarrassed. His curiosity as to why did not last long at all.

“Actually, I am a man.”

His mortification took an entirely different route. The memory of it, however fresh it was and however recent was one Robin hoped to eradicate through forced retention repression. Ears arguably a permanent shade of red at this point, Robin was lolling his head forward and immersing his face into the water.

Perhaps he could drown this way.

“If it serves to put your mind at ease, you are certainly not the first to call me as such.” A soft chuckle rose while the grubby articles were gathered up in *his* arms.

No wonder his outfit is the same as the rest of the clergymen.

“I’ve even been courted under the notion that I was a woman. Certainly…an interesting experience.” A small cough punctuated the statement while only a slight relief spread through the soaked, white haired vagabond. At the very least, it hadn’t gotten *that* far.

“Still, my original statement stands, you don’t need to wait on me hand and foot. Really, this is more than enough.” His voice was still weak from the devastating blow of humiliation. “I can certainly wash my own clothing. I’m sure you’ve got your hands full with your other responsibilities.” Sitting a bit straighter and wiping warm water from his face, he could see the blonde head shaking from here.

“It’s no trouble. I meant what I said when I would like to see you rest and get your fill tonight. I’ll leave a fresh set of robes for you to wear in the meantime.” Robin could not help it, even felt immediate guilt for thinking as such, but he was tense for a moment as he remembered his citizenship documents were tucked away in those very clothes. It was highly unlikely that this was some sort of elaborate rouse to take his last valuable item, but it seemed his mind always churned out every possible scenario during interactions, whether he wanted the two cents or not.

One could not control the process of the mind, and Robin knew he would not act upon such suspicions. Especially not toward someone as seemingly genuine, no matter how he deliberated the likelihood of ploy, naivety, and deception. He would learn to trust the right people, and despite his skepticism, he believed this man deserved it.

“My name is Libra. If you need anything, please do not hesitate to ask me or my fellow clergymen.”

And with that, Robin was left to his solitude. With the hush of the bath and the heat of the water, a calm settled over him. Scooping up a handful of water and letting it fall through his fingers, he tried to recall the name of the god Libra had mentioned. Though his circumstances certainly influenced his interest in the deity, it piqued his curiosity in an inexplicable manner.

Like he’d heard it before…

His throat went dry, eyes widening as he stared at the beads of water collected on his palm. He couldn't guarantee it was a lead, but he wasn't sure what else to call the sensation in his gut. His fingers slowly curled into a fist, squeezing once or twice before letting it loosen.

Oh—right—

With a level of hesitance, Robin was turning his hand over to inspect the insignia he had thoroughly ignored upon discovering it, almost having forgotten it existed at all as he'd not changed in nearly a fortnight. Yet any and all apprehension he had at taking a moment to fully study it vanished upon discovering said mark had also disappeared.

He squinted, drawing the back of his hand closer in disbelief, angling the appendage to catch the light while his thumb swiped bits of liquid from his skin as best he could.

Nothing.

Flexing his fingers, he was letting it go and lowering it into the water, leaning his head back against the rim of the basin and stared up at the abstract plumes of steam.

His tongue pulsed slightly as a bit of blood beaded against his lip.

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